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VII

Man and Nature

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A beautiful landscape in the Southern Appalachians

VII

Man and Nature

George B. Dorr

A paper written in 1913, when plans now realized for the creation of a national park upon Mount Desert Island were first brought forward.

The question of Public Reservations is of paramount importance in the eastern portion of our country, where we have already got a dense population swiftly created and swiftly growing denser without apparent limit.

Magnificent reservations have been created in the West, with wise prevision; nothing similar, save the recent first establishment of national forests in the Northern and the Southern Appalachians, has yet been undertaken in the East, with its far greater human need, its beautiful scenery, ready accessibility and permanently productive territory.

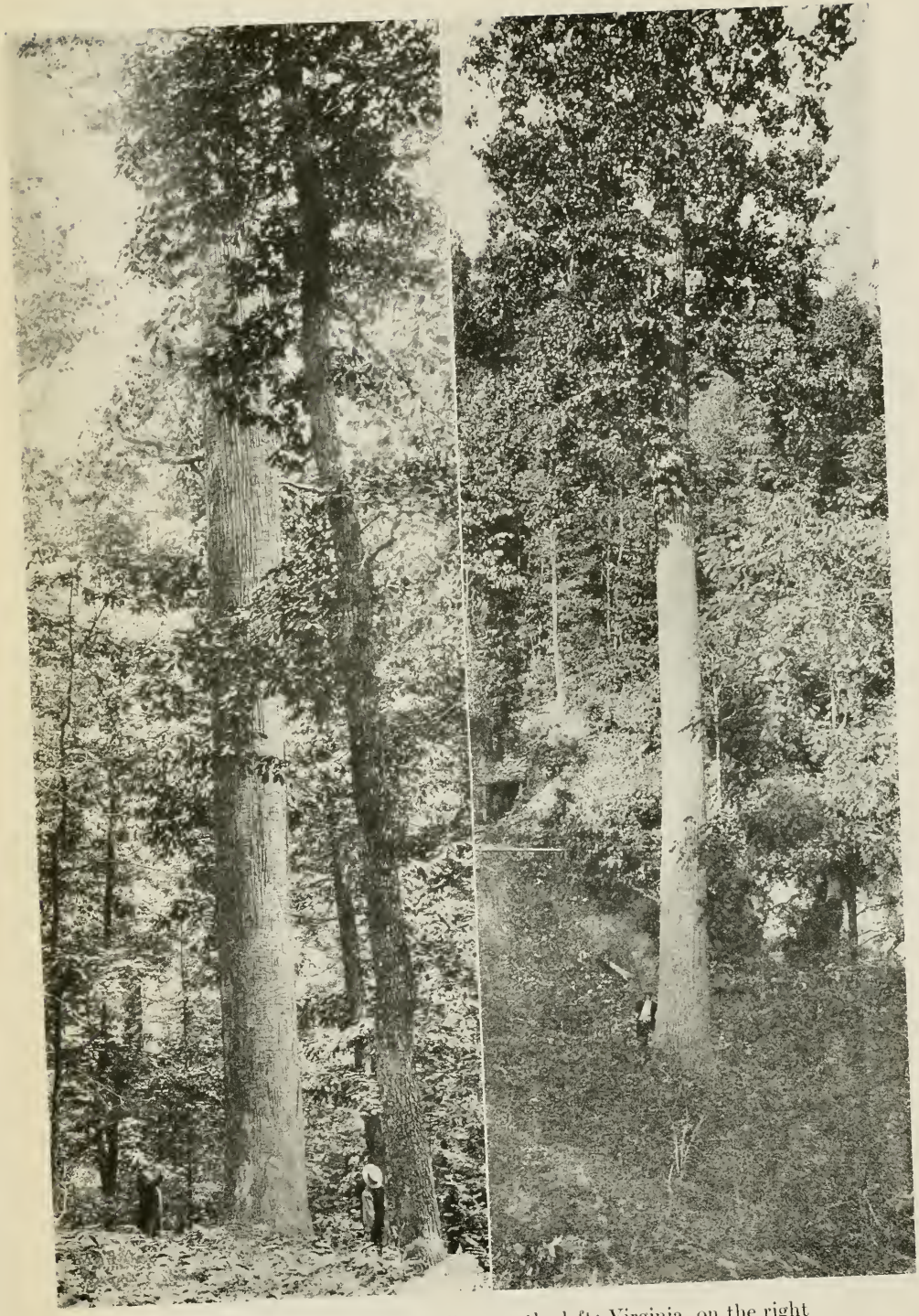
We are passing into a new phase of human life where men are congregating in vast multitudes, for industrial purposes, for trade and intercourse; the population of the future must inevitably be many times the population of the present, and the need of conserving now, while there is time, pleasant, wholesome breathing-places for these coming multitudes is great. How great, we can with difficulty realize in our country yet so newly occupied and in a period so new of growth and vast

industrial change, but what such open spaces in the form of commons have meant to England in the past, the long struggle to prevent their enclosure by the few shows strikingly, and what is lost by their absence in densely peopled regions of China, where every rod of ground is given up to the material struggle for existence, the accounts of all returning travellers tell.

But it is not a question of breathing-spaces and physical well-being only; it goes far beyond that and is deeply concerned with the inner life of men. With Nature in her beauty and freedom shut out from so many lives in these industrial and city-dwelling times, it is going to become—has, indeed, become already—a matter of supreme importance to preserve in their openness, in their unspoiled beauty and the charm of their wild life, their native trees and plants, their birds and animals, the places where the wealth or significance of these things is greatest, the places where the influence of Nature will be felt the most or where the life with which she has peopled the world, and man or chance has not destroyed, may be enjoyed and studied at its fullest.

The times are moving fast in the destruction of beautiful and interesting things. The lost opportunity of one year becomes the bitter regret of thinking people in a few years more. Valuable and interesting species of birds, that were still familiar a generation since and that might have added to the delight or wealth of the world forever, have now become extinct—as hopeless of resurrection as if we had known them only in fossil forms. Many a landscape and forest-land that should have remained forever unspoilt and public in the crowded eastern regions of the future has been ruined needlessly or locked up in private ownership.

In nothing is conservation needed more than in saving all that is economically possible of the pleasantness and freedom of Nature in regions accessible, even by travel,



Giant tulip trees: North Carolina, on the left; Virginia, on the right

to the vast, town-dwelling populations of the future; in preserving the features of scientific interest or landscape beauty that widen men's horizon or quicken their imagination. City parks and playgrounds, valuable and necessary as they are, cannot do this, nor can cultivated fields and motor-traversed roads. The bold hilltops and mountain-heights which the ancient Hebrews felt were God-inhabited; the clear springs in Syria over which the Greeks built temples through whose ruined stones the crystal water still comes gushing; the sacred groves of Italy and Druid oaks of Northern Europe, tell a story of the deep influence of such things upon the hearts and lives of men, an influence we cannot afford to lose today in our mechanism-shrunken modern world of immeasurably growing population.

By taking thought in season, little need be sacrificed to secure incalculable benefits in Nature's wilder near-by regions, in her grander landscapes that lie within the reach of busy men; in refreshing forests, not too limited; in picturesque and open downs beside the sea; or along the pleasant, wooded side of streams with unpolluted water. When coal becomes exhausted, water-power or other form of energy will take its place, but nothing will ever compensate for natural beauty permanently ruined within the narrowing bounds of modern life.

Life will always be a compromise between conflicting needs, but its needs are not material only. Man's future is deeply concerned with recognition of its spiritual side, and if there be anything in the world, next to the opportunity to gain the necessities of life, to meet disease or find the means of education, that should be kept open to right use by all, it is the wholesome freedom of Nature and opportunity for contact with her beauty and many-sided interest in appropriate tracts. The day will ultimately come when to provide such will be felt to be one of the most essential duties of the state or greatest privileges of wealthy citizens. For wiser and better gifts than

Lakes in the Sieur de Monts national park—Looking north toward the Mainland

these, to be public heritages forever, it were hard to find. Permanent as few others can be, they will only gain with time, in beauty often and in richness of association always. Changes in science or social organization, altered standards of artistic interest or change in charitable method will not destroy their value.

There are landscapes and tracts of land which for their beauty and exceptional interest—or their close relation to important centers—should be inalienably public, forever free to all. Our metropolitan parks and reservations are a first step in this direction, as are the national parks out West, but with increasing private ownership and rapidly increasing population, the movement is one that will need to go far eventually.

The earth is our common heritage. It is both right and needful that it should be kept widely free in the portions that the homes of men, industry and agriculture do not claim. Personal possession reaches out at widest but a little way, and passes quickly in the present day, gathering about itself little of that greater charm which time alone can give. If men of wealth would spend but a fraction of what they do for themselves alone, with brief result, in making the landscape about them beautiful for the benefit of all in permanent and simple ways, the result would be to give extraordinary interest—of a steadily accumulative kind—to every residential section of the land; and it would tend, besides, to give all men living in or passing through it a sense of personal possession in the landscape instead of injury at exclusion from it, and to give them, too, a freedom of wandering and a beauty by the way which do not lie within the reach of anyone today.

And with such gifts would also go the pleasant sense of sharing, of participation in a wholesome joy which each recurrent year would bring afresh. No monument could be a better one to leave behind, no memorial pleasanter—whether for one's self or others—than gifts like

Water lending beauty and refreshment to a Southern Woodland

these that make the earth a happier, a more interesting or delightful place for other men to live upon.

That this movement must grow, no one who has thought upon the matter can doubt—the movement for public parks and open spaces, near or far, not as playgrounds simply but as opportunities for Nature in her deep appeal and various beauty to remain an influence in human life; for places, too, where such features of wild life as may coexist with man can be preserved, and where plant life, whether in forest growths or the infinite detail of flowering plants and lowly forms, may still continue a source of health and happiness in man's environment.

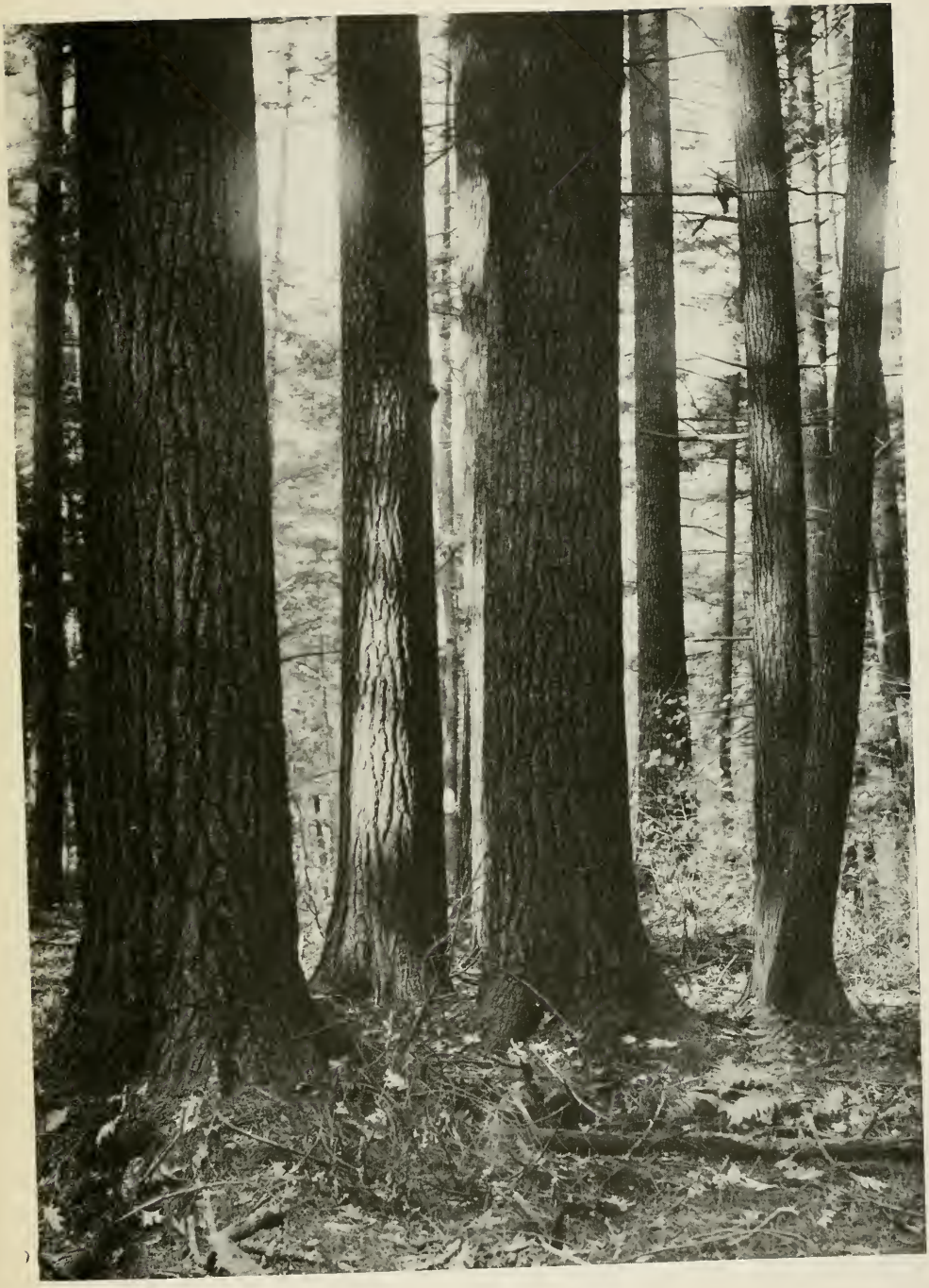
The movement will grow, as all great movements do, because a great truth — man's need for Nature — lies behind it. The essentially important thing is to save now what opportunity we can for its expansion later.

Our Duty to the Future

James Bryce

Extract from address delivered when ambassador to this country, urging the importance of creating national parks and forest reservations in the Eastern States before the opportunity was lost.

I have had experience in England in dealing with this question, having been for some years chairman of a society for preserving commons and open spaces and public rights of way, and having also served on the committee of another society for securing to the public places of national and historic interest. Thus I was led often to think of what is our duty to the future, and of the benefits which the preservation of places of natural beauty may confer on the community. That is a problem which presents itself not only in Great Britain but all over Europe, and now you in America are tending to



Giant Pine-trees in the north

become what Europe already is. Europe is now a populous, and in parts a crowded, continent; you, too, will some day be a populous, and ultimately, except in those regions which the want of rain condemns to sterility, a crowded continent; and it is well to take thought at once, before these days confront you, how you will deal with the difficulties which have met us in Europe. So that you may not find too late that the beauty, the freedom and primitive simplicity of nature have been snatched from you.

Of all those pleasures the power to enjoy which has been implanted in us, the love of Nature is the very simplest and best. It is the most easily accessible; it is one which can never be perverted; it is one of which you cannot have too much; and it lasts from youth to age. Then, too, there are the literary associations which clothe many a wild or lovely spot with poetry. The farther a people recedes from barbarism, the more refined its tastes, the more gentle its manners, the less sordid its aims, so much the greater is its susceptibility to every form of beauty, so much the more do the charms of Nature appeal to it. Delight in them is a test of civilization.

Now, let us remember that the regions and spots calculated to give enjoyment in the highest form are limited, and are being constantly encroached upon.

Although you have set a wholesome example in creating the National Parks you have, there are still other places where National Parks are wanted. There is a splendid region in the Alleghenies, a region of beautiful forests, where the tulip trees lift their tall, smooth shafts and graceful heads one hundred and fifty feet or more into the air, a mountain land on the borders of North Carolina and East Tennessee, with romantic river valleys and hills clothed with luxuriant woods, primitive forests standing as they stood before the white man drove the Indians away, high lawns filled with flowers

The path to Huguenot Head and a great ocean view; Sieur de Monts national park

and traversed by sparkling brooks, containing everything to delight the heart of the lover of Nature. It would be a fine thing to have a tract of three or four hundred thousand acres set apart there for the benefit of the people of the South and Middle Atlantic States, for whom it is a far cry to the Rockies.

Then there are the Northeastern States with their mountains and forests. No other part of Eastern America can compare with this for the varied charms of a wild and romantic nature. And as wealth increases in other parts of the country, as the gigantic cities of the Eastern States grow still vaster, as population thickens in the agricultural and manufacturing parts of Ohio and Pennsylvania, of Indiana and Illinois, the love of nature and the desire for health-giving recreation will draw more and more of the population of those cities and states to seek these spots where Nature shows at her loveliest. Do not suffer, therefore, any of the charms they offer to be lost by want of foresight now.

Save your woods, not only because they are one of your great natural resources but also because they are a source of beauty which once lost can never be recovered.

Preserve the purity of your streams and lakes, not merely for the sake of the angler but also for the sake of those who live on the banks, and of those who come to seek the freshness and delight of an unspoiled nature by the lake or river side.

Keep open the long ridges that lead up to the rocky summits of your mountains; let no man debar you from free access to their tops, or from enjoyment of the broad prospects they afford.

And keep wide woodland spaces open within the reach of cities, where those who seek quiet and the sense of communing with Nature can go and spend whole days enjoying one spot after another where Nature has provided her simple joys—mingled shade and sunlight falling on the long vistas of the forest, the ripple and

murmur of a streamlet, the rustling of the leaves, and the birds singing among the branches. No better service can be rendered to the masses of the people than to preserve for their delight wide spaces of fine scenery.

We are trustees for the future; we are not here for ourselves alone. These gifts were not given to us to be used by a single generation, or with the thought of one generation only before our minds. We are the heirs of those who have gone before and charged with the duty we owe to those who shall come after; and there is no duty which seems more clearly incumbent on us than handing on to others undiminished opportunities and facilities for the enjoyment of some of the best gifts that the Creator has bestowed upon his children.

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